

great news for HUD, the administration, and most importantly, the millions of Americans served by HUD's programs.

When we first took office, Al Gore and I promised the American people that we would improve the way our Government serves them. We had no greater challenge than HUD, which was mired in bureaucracy and which Congress had targeted for elimination. That was then, but this is now. Today, we have a Department that has turned itself around and, as this report clearly states, can serve as a role model for all Federal agencies.

I want to congratulate Secretary Cuomo, his team at HUD, and all of the Department's 9,000 employees for this significant achievement. I have no doubt it will serve as a milestone in HUD's history and foreshadow the kind of service that the Department will offer the American people in the years to come.

### **Statement on Labor Department Regulations on Private Health Care Plans**

*November 20, 2000*

Today I am pleased to announce that the Labor Department is issuing final regulations requiring private health plans covering 130 million Americans to provide a fast and fair internal appeals process for patients when coverage has been denied or delayed. Under this new rule, for the first time, health plans would be required to make coverage decisions quickly—within 72 hours for urgent requests—and to provide consumers with meaningful information on their rights and benefits. Currently, many health plans do not have the medical expertise to make such decisions, and approval of necessary services can take as long as 300 days.

Under the strong leadership of Secretary Herman, we are taking an important step towards providing Americans the health care protections they need. It is the final executive action I can take to provide critical protections to patients in private health plans. It builds on my administration's previous action to provide critical patient protections to the 85 million Americans in Federal health plans. But the only way to give every American in

every health plan the right to see a specialist, to go to the nearest emergency room—not the cheapest—and to hold health care plans accountable when they cause harm, is to pass a real, enforceable Patients' Bill of Rights. Whether it is this year or next year, Congress should come together to pass this long overdue legislation.

### **Statement on the Death of Lars-Erik Nelson**

*November 21, 2000*

Hillary and I are deeply saddened to learn of the death of Lars-Erik Nelson, one of New York's most distinctive voices and one of America's leading journalists. He was a fearless, independent, no nonsense reporter and columnist who believed in getting to the heart of a story and getting it right.

Lars-Erik Nelson distinguished himself as a foreign correspondent and as a skilled Russian translator, but his real gift was translating complex stories about our democracy for the American people. He did it with humor and a dogged pursuit for the truth. As his friends knew, beneath his gruff exterior was a gentle spirit and a warm heart. Hillary and I will miss him and the unique insight that he shared with New York and the entire Nation. Our thoughts and prayers are with his wife, Mary, and his entire family.

### **Remarks at the Thanksgiving Turkey Presentation Ceremony**

*November 22, 2000*

**The President.** I want to thank Secretary Glickman and National Turkey Federation Chairman Jerry Jerome and President Stuart Proctor for being here. And I want to welcome the young people who are here, especially those who are from the Boys and Girls Club of Greater Washington.

*[At this point, there was a noise from the far end of the Rose Garden.]*

**The President.** I am—what's all that noise up there? *[Laughter]* What is it? It sounds like another turkey about to fly down here. *[Laughter]*